The Princess and the Whipping Girl: Chapter I
By Yu May

The sun had just risen over the little Kingdom of Ardor, casting a warm glow across the land. In the castle dining hall, the royal family had gathered to celebrate Princess Isadora's twelfth birthday. The princess was dressed in a glittering silver gown with a diamond tiara atop her flowing, pale gold hair.

But though she was surrounded by endless gifts and sweets, Isadora was making a nuisance of herself before all the royal court. Her parents hadn't paid much attention to the development of Isadora's character, and the long years of reports and complaints from servants, tutors, and governesses had made little impression on the King and Queen.

However, when Isadora's parents saw her rudely dismissing their assembled guests, including several Princes and wealthy nobles who they considered suitable suitors for their daughter, they suddenly realized they had thoroughly spoiled their only daughter. They were the last two adults in the castle to come to this stunning conclusion, but to their credit, when they finally did have this revelation, they knew that something must be done.

That evening, sunset lit the old throne room. The King and Queen were not dressed in full regalia anymore. Now they were dressed in comparatively simple garments, still richly embroidered but more practical for their day to day affairs. But King Meynard IV still insisted on sitting on his throne while conducting any business, even simple household matters. It was one of his many eccentric points.

Except for two guards who stood silent vigil at the door, their butler, Winchester, was the only other soul in the overly large room. He was a rather doleful old fellow, nearly bald except for a crown of lanky white hair that gave him the appearance of a hound.

King Meynard curled his mustache elegantly, but this casual gesture was undermined when his voice cracked into a wail. "What can we do, Winchester? If she carries on like this, Isadora will never find a husband, and never produce an heir! Oh! My poor little angel!"

"Well, you could give her a damn good spanking to start with, since she's been gunning for one since she was two years old. After that, you might pay more attention to her, so that she doesn't feel the need to act out just to get you to talk to her," is what Winchester thought, but did *not* say out loud. Instead, he opted for the same tact that

had kept him employed since King Meynard III's boyhood years. "May I speak freely, Your Highness?"

"Of course, Winchester!" interjected Queen Magritte, who despite her lack of wits was at least sensible enough to know when she was out of her depth.

Winchester took a moment to consider how best to phrase his idea. "Perhaps we should reconsider the custom of employing a whipping girl."

King Meynard put a hand to his chin. "…But then, how will Isadora learn discipline if there is no whipping girl to take her spanking for her?"

If a painter had been there, he could have immortalized King Meynard forever in oil, the very image of a wise, intelligent, and contemplative monarch. Winchester suddenly found himself very happy that he was not a court painter. "Well, since the custom of employing a whipping boy or girl in the castle is entirely within your executive privilege, you could amend it by royal decree without an act of Parliament. For example, you might permit princes and princesses to receive corporal punishment. With your approval, those responsible for Princess Isadora's care and education could employ…moderate forms of chastisement to encourage Princess Isadora to improve her behavior. Only as a last resort, and with your explicit approval."

King Meynard IV hemmed and hawed. "Moderate? Hrm? Hum! But don't we need the spankings to be severe? Otherwise, what's the point?"

Winchester raised his balding pate, his dog-ear locks of white hair flapping. Was the King actually going to approve his idea?

Seeing his wise, old servant so taken aback, Meynard swelled with pride at having thought of something so clever! Meynard tickled his chin, in that same, soulful way. "Ah! I see, you old cad! You want me to approve *even more* spankings for the whipping girl! That way, you servants can wallop her all day in front of Isadora. Genius! When my little angel sees a poor, unfortunate soul suffering on her behalf, her conscience will be pricked, and that will make her be good again! Fetch Isadora and that whipping girl, right away!"

Winchester could actually *feel* the castle crumbling underneath him, and could just *see* the entire kingdom collapsing into chaos, before being consumed by fire and brimstone from above as a divine judgment for foolish rulers. "Your Highness, we do not currently have a whipping girl in our employ. You will recall we lost Elise–our first whipping girl,"

Winchester added the last part quickly when he saw the King's look of confusion, "when Elise ran away to join the navy? And then Anya–our second whipping girl, you remember her? She was committed to that insane asylum for a few weeks, then never returned? …I think she's a nurse now, come to think of it!"

Meynard sat up straight in his chair. Sadly, Parliament had long ago deprived the king the right to mete out capital punishment. "What, what what! Winchester! You've neglected your duties! You should have hired another whipping girl immediately!"

Winchester swallowed a sigh, and felt it slide down and plonk into his stomach. "Oh, your highness loves his little joke! Of course, you have not forgotten that, last year, shortly after Anya broke out…uh, broke off her employment here, Parliament passed that act which denied the orphanage the right to send out children for any kind of employment? …You signed the act into law yourself."

"Humph! One wonders what rights the Parliament *haven't* curtailed! Of course, I suppose that means suitable candidates for the position of whipping girl are now hard to come by? Curse this economy! Well, then, what do you propose? Speak frankly, old bean!"

Winchester silently prayed as he uttered the words. "Perhaps you could allow Princess Isadora to be spanked, instead of a whipping girl?"

The King's mustache drooped in shock. "…What?"

Queen Margritte clapped her hands excitedly. "Oh! I see! Meynard, dear, Winchester is saying we could allow Princess Isadora to be spanked, instead of a whipping girl!"

This time, the King's mustache puffed out in fury. "I heard what he said! I just can't believe he'd be so bold as to suggest…in my presence…Bah! What is civilization coming to, these days? Spank my daughter? Spank my precious baby-bummy-bumpy-boo? Spank the first and only Princess of the Realm? Spank the future mother of the future divinely appointed King? It's an outrage against all common sense and decency!"

Margritte giggled. "Oh, but I had no whipping girl growing up, and I turned out fine! Really, I think we're the only monarchy that still bothers to keep around a whipping girl."

The mustache curled in annoyance. "Precisely my point! It's a distinctively Ardorian tradition! A symbol of our national character! I had a whipping boy, and look how I

turned out! …Well, that settles it! Winchester, as my wisest and most loyal counselor, I'm trusting you to *find* another whipping girl. If those heathens won't let us provide such an excellent opportunity to a poor, unfortunate child from the orphanage, perhaps you can find a suitable girl who *doesn't* live at the orphanage. That act doesn't cover *voluntary* employment, with the approval of a parent or guardian!"

It occurred to Winchester that, if Queen Margritte had just a bit more wit, she could have made a fine Monarch herself. In these times of relative peace and constitutional fever, there weren't many responsibilities left for a monarch, and Margritte was kind and willing enough. However, King Meynard was *just* clever enough to be troublesome, without a hint of Margrittes' hint of common sense.

Winchester had seen this same problem brewing when Meynard IV was a boy, and though Meynard III had generally been a decent and competent king, the matter of the whipping boy tradition had been his one blind spot. Now, that blind spot was repeating itself.

Winchester steeled himself up for what he already knew was a doomed, final stand. "Your highness, the ancient tradition of keeping a friend and maidservant to be the companion of the Princess might be honored and retained. At the same time, perhaps *your daughter* might benefit from a new approach to discipline and instruction. We've had two whipping girls already, and both left us after having been thoroughly whipped. Yet, no change has been produced in Princess Isadora's attitude thus far. If you believe that hiring a third whipping girl will produce different results, only give me the order, and I shall procure one for you! Or, if you wish me to prepare an alternative educational program for Isadora's instruction, subject to your approval, give me the order and I shall do so!"

This time, King Meynard didn't bother to pose like a philosopher to think over his decision. "We'll have the whipping girl, then! That's my will, as your King!"

Winchester bowed his head, an act of honor, but felt only shame. "Your wish is my command, your Highness!" With that, the old servant walked backwards out of the throne room, so as not to disrespect the King by showing his back.

Once outside the throne room, Winchester marched with a quick professional stride. The harsh click of his steps were the only hint at the annoyance he felt. And behind the calm face, the brain was clicking away at a plan of action. "Very well, if we must have a whipping girl, I'll get the best damned whipping girl there's ever been! At least let Isadora have a girl of some substance for a companion!"

The sun had completely set, and he knew the castle staff were finally starting to settle down for the night after working since dawn.

Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted Princess Isadora, still sitting in the dining room, enjoying a massive pile of presents, all alone. No noble children her age had bothered to stay for long. In only a few years, she'd come of age. But no Prince who courted her would bother to return for a second evening. Ardor was only a little kingdom after all.

At the sound of the steps, Isadora's eyes snapped up from her new, hand-painted porcelain doll. "Oh! Winchester! Have these brought up to my room, would you, please?"

Winchester smiled. At least she had learned "please" and "thank you." "Of course, my lady. I shall arrange to have them brought to your room and the old nursery, by tomorrow morning."

"No! It must be now! I *need* them in my room right now!" barked Isadora, in the tone of voice she had learned from King Meynard.

"The only thing you *need* right now is a damn good spanking, and a father who loves you enough to give you one," is what Winchester thought and did *not* say.

"As you wish, my lady." Winchester bowed, knowing that he'd have to awaken all three servant boys, and probably have to stoop to helping the poor lads carry the presents up himself, if it was to be done before the Princess' bedtime.

And just as he knew the servant boys would go to bed tired, only to get up the next morning at the crack of dawn, he knew that Isadora would ignore her bed-time anyway. Which meant that, starting tomorrow morning, everyone would have to deal with a tired and grouchy Princess Isadora.

When Meynard IV was just a boy, Winchester had quite liked him. Meynard's faults, which were euphemized as his "personal eccentricities," had only been mildly annoying. At first. But the "eccentricities" had grown into a national embarrassment, and Winchester had slowly forgotten whatever it was he had liked about the young Meynard.

Winchester quite liked Isadora. She was damn clever, when she put her mind to her studies. Back when she'd had the first whipping girl, Isadora had even tried to be good sometimes, if only for the sake of her little playmate Elise. But by the time Anya had

taken over the position of whipping girl, Winchester could see Isadora's "personal eccentricities" were also starting to take over.

After he finished helping the servant boys haul up the last of the birthday presents, Winchester thanked them and sent them off, yawning, back to bed. Then he put on his riding cloak and took a lantern to finish his business, which would keep him up til dawn.

The Princess needed a lot of things. But a new whipping girl would have to do. And Winchester had just the girl in mind.

[End of Chapter I]